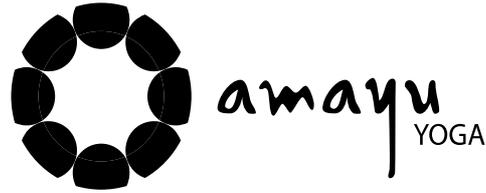


# Amāyu Code of Ethics and Safe Space



This document set out the standards of ethical and professional behaviour expected of Amāyu teachers, registered studios, trainees and volunteers. As Amāyu members, we have committed ourselves to upholding these ethical standards and recognise that our membership, certification and right to use the Amāyu name and logo may be at risk if we fail to fulfil our commitments.

Teaching yoga is a complex, thoughtful and challenging role which requires in-depth knowledge, qualifications, experience and skill across a range of subject areas. Amāyu believes that whilst the imparting of knowledge across this range of subject areas is critical to being an exceptional teacher, the fundamental role of a yoga teacher is to create and maintain a safe and supportive physical, mental and emotional space for practitioners. This goes beyond the scope of teaching the physical asana practice and must include thought given to the following:

- Ethical behaviour, professional boundaries and sexual exploitation
- Equality
- Communication, language and behaviour
- Safety and the physical studio space
- Consent and offering physical assistance
- Teacher self-care and self-awareness
- Confidentiality
- Grievances
- Relationship with Peers
- Business Integrity

A safe, supportive and professional teacher – practitioner relationship, requires the teacher to have the highest standards of professional conduct. Yoga teachers need to respect the rights and dignity of all practitioners and acknowledge the trust placed in the teacher by the practitioner. A practitioner – teacher dynamic inherently is one of power imbalance whether in yoga or other teaching environment. In the yoga classroom, the teacher is seen as the ‘expert’, the practitioner as ‘seeking physical, emotional and sometimes spiritual knowledge/wisdom’.

Teachers must proactively create an environment and culture where the practitioner – teacher power dynamic is acknowledged. Steps should be taken to minimise this establishing an environment in which the practitioner and teacher co-creates their yoga practice.

This requires the teacher to offer a range of opportunities for the practitioner to make choices, including but not limited to variations on a yoga asana, not undertaking a particular asana when appropriate, the giving or withdrawal consent for assists and making time for conversations about what is important to the practitioner.

This Code of Ethics is the main point of reference for grievance complaints and investigations and should be read in conjunction with the following guidance and policies.

- Practitioner – Teacher Guidelines
- Safeguarding Policy
- Grievance Policy and procedure
- Whistleblowing Policy

### **Policy statement**

Amāyu believes that everyone has a right to enjoy a yoga practice free from fear or harm regardless of their background, experience or ability and that yoga teachers are able to work with people in a way which puts the practitioner at the centre of the practice without the risk of good intentions being misconstrued.

This Code of Ethics sets out the approach Amāyu studios, teachers, volunteers and trainees will take to creating a safe space for all. Failure to do so may result in a revocation of Amāyu membership.

### **Aims and Objectives of this Policy**

- Enabling Amāyu teachers, to explain the yoga practice and environment to new practitioners
- Ensuring teachers are proactive in creating an environment that empowers practitioners to control their own bodies and places informed consent at the heart of their teaching and assisting of practitioners
- Ensuring practitioners understand the yoga practice and dynamics of the classroom environment and feel empowered to make informed choices about their yoga practice and give or withdraw consent for assisting at any time

### **Definitions**

Teacher – for the purposes of this policy, the term ‘teacher’ refers to any Amāyu faculty member, teacher, studio, volunteer or trainee teacher who is offering the yoga practice to another person.

Practitioner – the term ‘practitioner’ refers to a person undertaking a yoga practice.

Yoga practice - may encompass a range of subjects including but not limited to asana, meditation, pranayama, Ayurveda, chanting, anatomy or philosophy.

Assisting/Assists – a verbal, physical or demonstrative way of supporting a practitioner to vary the asana posture in a way that supports a person’s physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and development

Variation – an alternative way of undertaking or practising an asana, pranayama technique or meditation that supports a person’s physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and development

### Values and principles

1. **Ahimsa – Nonviolence and Compassion** As yoga teachers we seek to do no harm to others and to act with care and compassion.
2. **Satya – Truthfulness** As yoga teachers we act truthfully at all times.
3. **Asteya – Not stealing** As yoga teachers we only take what is rightfully ours.
4. **Brahmacharya – Self-Restraint in the path to wholeness** We recognise that the teacher – practitioner relationship exists to serve the deepest goals of the practitioner and their yoga practice. Thus we practise self-restraint and direct our energy and actions toward these deep aims of yoga.
5. **Aparigraha – Non-clinging** As yoga teachers we practise the principle of nonattachment and generosity and we welcome change, acknowledging the natural abundance of life.
6. **Sauca – Purity/Cleanliness** As yoga teachers we cultivate purity of body, mind and environment. This includes fostering clarity of intention, ongoing self-care and a clean environment for yoga practice.
7. **Santosa – Contentment/Happiness** As yoga teachers we practice an active acceptance of the present thus developing deep happiness.
8. **Tapas – Discipline** As yoga teachers, we are dedicated to a disciplined and committed yogic lifestyle.
9. **Swadhyaya – Self-Study** As yoga teachers we are committed to ongoing self-reflection and continued learning.
10. **Ishvarapranidhana – Relationship with Wholeness** Our aim as a yoga teacher is to serve the deepest goals of the practitioner, ourselves and the yoga practice. We honour and encourage an on-going relationship with innate wholeness and oneness with all life.

## Ethical behaviour, professional boundaries and sexual exploitation

The practitioner – teacher relationship must be one of trust, safety and equality. Teachers must respect professional boundaries and behave in a manner which upholds the professionalism of the service and does not bring the service into disrepute.

- Recognise the power-imbalance that is inherent between teacher and practitioner and not harass or exploit practitioners physically, psychologically, emotionally, sexually or financially (see Amāyu *Safeguarding Policy* for more information)
- Always gain consent for physical assists and respect a practitioner's right to refuse assists regardless of whether they have accepted them previously
- Always consider why we are assisting practitioners and ensuring this is in service to their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and not our own ego or in pursuit of the perfect posture
- Create, maintain and reinforce appropriate professional and experiential boundaries, it is not a teachers role to offer therapy (unless you are a trained and experienced Yoga or other Therapist).
- Teachers should signpost practitioners to appropriate services of support and it is their responsibility to know what these might be in their local area – see *Scope of Practise*.
- Have a basic understanding of mental health challenges and the impact this can have on a person's life and practice and be proactive in identifying practitioners who may need additional support or may not feel able to refuse physical assists
- Understand and be able to teach a range of assists that include verbal, demonstrative and physical in order to support practitioners in the way that suits them best
- Be aware of and considerate of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs and limitations of practitioners
- Dress in a way that reflects well on the yoga profession and is appropriate for a physical teaching environment for example, consider norms of modesty and inappropriate slogans
- Do not have sexual or intimate relationships or behave sexually towards practitioners, trainees, mentees or supervisees
- Declare and take appropriate steps to address any conflict of interest that may arise in dealings with practitioners
- **Acts of sexual harassment, assault or criminal activity of any kind by any yoga teacher are illegal and unethical and will not be tolerated by Amāyu. If criminal activity is brought to the attention of Amāyu it will be reported to the police – Please see Amāyu *Grievance Policy* for further information**

## Equality

Provide a safe environment where all practitioners, teachers, volunteers and members can enjoy equality of opportunity and practice or work without fear of discrimination or harm

- Treat all practitioners with respect regardless of age, gender, sex, race, physical and psychological disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy/maternity status or religious affiliation and in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 (for UK teachers)
- Do not make assumptions about other people's anything (race, culture, beliefs, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity etc) and do not use or allow racist, heterosexist, classist or othering language without confronting it and correcting yourself so that people feel safe.
- Take responsibility for educating yourself about the biases and privileges that you carry based on your race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, sex, age culture or religious background and how this may impact on your ability to teach or hold a safe space for all
- Respect the values, beliefs and aspirations of all yoga practitioners

## Communication, language and behaviour

Language and behaviour can contradict one another, and the practitioners experience is defined by both. Amāyu teachers must ensure their language and behaviour are congruent with Amāyu values and inclusive of all. Offensive language which seeks to denigrate any community of people is not acceptable in an Amāyu studio. Ensure communication is respectful, helpful, honest, empathic and kind.

Remember Rumi's 3 tests – Is it true, Is it necessary, Is it kind?

- Communicate respect for practitioners through actions, language and behaviour
- Listen both verbally and non-verbally to practitioner's needs, concerns, and preferences
- Communicate clearly about ways to practise yoga safely
- Seek consent before, and be respectful when, physically assisting a practitioner
- When offering assistance try to use language of inquiry and offer options e.g. "if you'd like to, close your eyes" or "you may or may not be feeling a sensation in your legs".
- Offer support to help the practitioner stay curious about their response to a pose and the suitability of an asana for their body at that time.
- Try to make it clear that you are offering *options* and they can decide.
- Always think before disclosing parts of our own lives that have been a struggle and only share what supports practitioner's growth and is in-service of them
- Make comments about a practitioner's practice that are constructive and positive and not denigrating
- Ensure you are available to listen and really hear their story, supporting where you can and signposting where the issue is outside your knowledge or professional expertise

- Senior teachers who are supervising or mentoring other teachers have a responsibility to communicate clearly and supportively about a teacher's progression, skill and any areas of development that may be required

### **Safety and the physical studio space**

The space in which practitioners' practice is an integral part of their experience of yoga and it is the teacher's responsibility to provide a space which is both physically and psychologically safe and appropriate for the practice of yoga.

- Avoid being the expert and actively work to equalise the inherent power dynamic that exists between a teacher and practitioner, instead working to establish an environment where the practitioner and teacher co-create the practice.
- Remember – the practitioner is the expert in their own body, mind and spirit, the teacher is the expert in the yoga practice, teachers are there to 'facilitate' change not 'fix' practitioners
- Maintain a safe, clean and comfortable environment for the teaching and practice of yoga
- Images of people who have been associated with the perpetration of abuse are not appropriate in an Amāyu studio at any time.
- This means you should also consider whether images may be in use in studios or classrooms where you are invited to teach and be proactive in creating conversation about the impact these images may have on practitioners and teachers
- You may also wish to be aware that traditional Indian deity statues or ornaments may also have a negative impact on those practitioners who have suffered trauma or abuse. This doesn't mean you must remove them but awareness of this should help you identify and support practitioners who may be triggered by them
- Maintain safety procedures for yoga equipment
- Maintain public liability and professional indemnity insurance requirements
- Maintain current physical and mental health first aid training qualification and competency

### **Consent and offering physical assistance**

Yoga is a physical health modality where teachers are often placing their hands on practitioners bodies in ways which mirror other more regulated professions including massage, bodywork and health care. Physical, verbal and demonstrative assisting can be extremely helpful to a practitioner's yoga practice and can allow them to develop in ways they may find more difficult by themselves.

Verbal and demonstrative assisting is fundamental to ensuring a practitioner's safe practice providing cues on physical alignment, mental or breath processes that prevent injury or

support recovery. However, assists can also be unwanted, intrusive and for some, frightening or traumatising.

For Ashtanga and many other yoga schools, physical assistance of the practitioner is commonplace. Historically many schools of yoga and particularly Ashtanga, have assumed practitioners both need and want physical assistance without first seeking the practitioner's explicit consent and giving them the choice to say no.

Furthermore, some teachers across a range of yoga schools, have behaved unethically, inappropriately and criminally when assisting practitioners, causing sustained physical injury and carrying out sexual assault and rape. This behaviour will not be tolerated in Amāyu and anyone reporting inappropriate behaviour will be listened to and have their allegations thoroughly investigated. Criminal behaviour will be reported to the police. Please *Grievance Policy* for further information.

It is critical that practitioners are empowered to give explicit and informed consent for assistance and this means offering a range of opportunities to have conversations about consent and assistance throughout the practitioner's journey of their yoga practice, with the teacher.

Consent should be thought of as informed, affirmative and ongoing. It is a tool to help practitioners cultivate awareness of their own body and non-verbally communicate this to the teacher, as well as how they may be feeling on a given day and how much they want to invite the teacher into their practise.

There are a number of things teachers must have in place to support a practitioner-led, informed consent process and these include:

- New practitioner form which asks for information about a practitioner's physical and mental health and consent for assistance ([see Appendix 1 for example](#))
- Offering private space and time for the practitioner to discuss their health challenges, assistance requirements or concerns with their teacher. This can include a range of options – phone call, private consultation space in studio or opportunity for a pre-meet before attending class
- Consent cards available for use at the studio or class and these should be introduced to students new to the teacher or studio as a matter of course. Consideration should be given to when the best time to introduce consent cards to beginners.
- Regular discussion and reminders during classes that consent is ongoing and can be given or withdrawn at any time for a range of reasons which do not need to be explained to the teacher
- Visual demonstrations that assisting is a process of co-creating the practitioner's yoga practice and feedback on how it feels so the teacher can adjust their approach is vital along with clear guidance that 'surrendering' to the practice, teacher or assist is not an empowering model of yoga practice
- When a practitioner can't see the teacher approaching, you must make your presence known first before verbalising your offer of assistance and asking if they

would like support – only assist when you have explicit consent which may be verbal or non-verbal

- Where appropriate, asking for feedback from the practitioner about how the variation or assist feels for them
- Once you are aware of a practitioner's preferences for assistance e.g. only verbal or explanation first, ensure you respect this
- If possible, offer at least one non-assisted class on your schedule
- Make yourself available for discussion with practitioners on a 1-2-1 basis about any concerns or changes they may be experiencing

### **Teacher self-care and self-awareness**

Yoga is a thought provoking and physically and emotionally demanding practice. Each day practitioners and their teachers come to the mat with a range of pressures, circumstances and experiences that can muddle our thinking. It is important that the teacher is aware of their own triggers and vulnerabilities and put in place self-care arrangements that ensure they are able to remain grounded and self-regulated when in a position of responsibility for practitioners.

- Teachers must work through their own challenges in other spaces and not when in a teaching position.
- Utilise your mentor and Amāyu support networks and make time to check in with yourself before and after teaching a class.
- Recognise when you need professional support and try to make space in your life to do the things that nourish and energise you.

### **Confidentiality**

We will meet our obligations for confidentiality and data security and protection and adhere to those laws which pertain to our country of registration.

- Comply with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 in the UK (please check with your country of registration for compliance requirements)
- Protect practitioners' privacy and right to confidentiality, always ask for explicit consent to share information with other professionals or people only if it is for the benefit of the practitioner
- Treat all information about practitioners as confidential unless there are exceptional circumstances where safeguarding concerns override our commitment to practitioner confidentiality – See Amāyu *Safeguarding Policy* for more information
- Obtain consent from practitioners before photographing, audio or video recording or permitting third party observation of yoga sessions.

## **Grievances**

We will ensure we have appropriate policies and procedures in place for reporting and addressing complaints and grievances and we will proactively bring these to practitioner's attention.

- Acknowledge the practitioner's right to make a complaint and support them in doing so, offering other colleagues for support if more appropriate
- Take all necessary actions to resolve any complaints or grievances as outlined in the *Amāyu Grievance Policy*

## **Relationship with Peers**

This section outlines a professional approach to working with other yoga teachers and relevant practitioners from associated professions.

- Speak respectfully of other yoga traditions and health modalities
- Treat other yoga teachers and colleagues in a respectful manner
- When appropriate, refer to and work cooperatively with other yoga teachers and relevant health and wellbeing practitioners, to meet the needs of the practitioner
- Consult and take advice from colleagues, mentors and supervisors when appropriate

## **Business Integrity**

Integrity in business is as important as our behaviour with others and all teachers, studios and trainees have a responsibility to ensure our business arrangements are congruent with Amāyu values.

- All trainers, staff or volunteers who work with children, young people or adults are required to undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, appropriate to the role being undertaken – See *Amāyu Safeguarding Policy* for further information
- Abide by all relevant business and legislative requirements, including, but not limited to, insurance, work cover, pay and conditions, data security and protection, taxation, accounting, marketing and advertising and copyright
- Ensure all information relating to the benefits of yoga and information used for promotional and marketing purposes is accurate, fair, clearly stated and not misleading in any way
- Treat all employees, the community, practitioners, colleagues and other yoga businesses fairly, transparently and honestly in the course of all business transactions
- Adhere to environmentally friendly and sustainable business practices, including, but not limited to, recycling, using energy efficient products, being energy efficient, reducing waste, saving water and travelling smarter

Signed: 

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> August 2019

Insert Job Title: Amāyu co-founder

On behalf of Amāyu Cooperative

Review Date: 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020

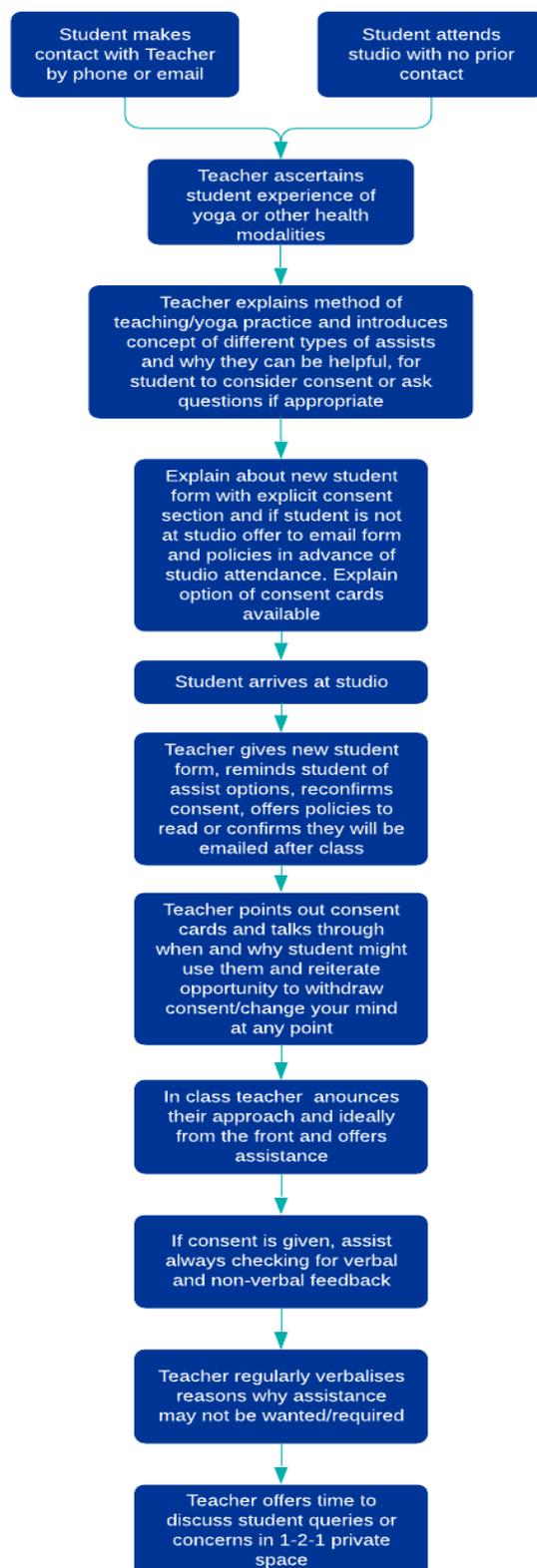
We gratefully acknowledge and appreciate drawing on the work of [Yoga Australia](#), [True Yoga](#) and the [Yoga Service Council](#).

Amāyu teachers are required to consider different practitioner experiences including:

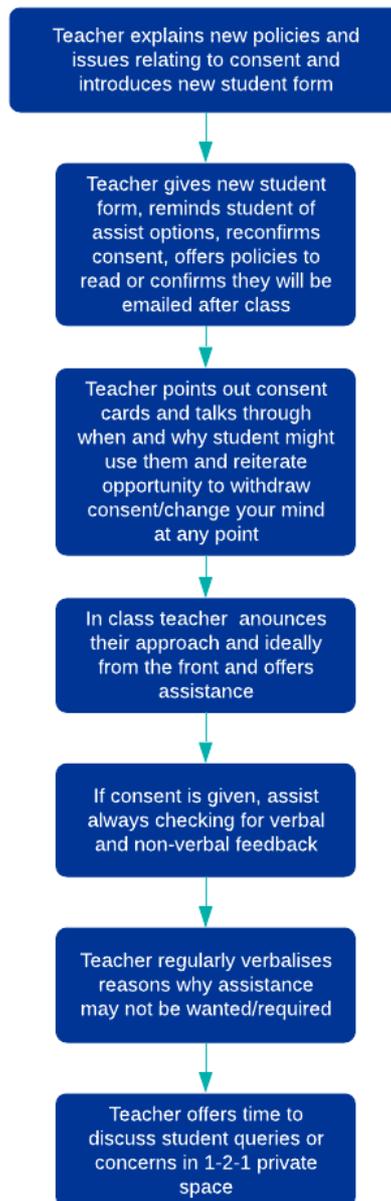
- Practitioners completely new to the yoga practice and teacher
- Existing yoga practitioners not known to the teacher
- Existing or longer-term yoga practitioners known to the teacher
- Existing or longer-term yoga practitioners not known to the teacher

The following flow charts outline the **minimum** requirements for Amāyu teachers:

## Students new to Yoga Practice and/or Teacher



## Existing Students known to Teacher



## Existing Students not known to Teacher (e.g. retreats, cover classes)

